



InspireDance

Amy Dalton, Head of Dance Development at artsNK explains why dance is so important to young people and how Inspire Dance is bringing dance to schools in Lincolnshire.



We know that children and young people's participation in dance has decreased in the past few years as statistics from various surveys all point to falling numbers. Linda Jasper, Director of Youth Dance England, wrote recently that dance remains "a marginalised artform, with significant reductions in participation both in and outside school". This reduction in young people accessing dance, and the multitude of benefits it offers, needs to be addressed.

The consequences of young people not accessing dance in any shape or form, but particularly in school and for free, means that the next generation will be less artistically conscious, less aware of their own bodies, understand less about what dance is, potentially have lower self-confidence and perhaps be less active. I could go on, as the list of benefits from taking part in dance is huge and far-ranging, but the question is what can we do about this situation.

The larger issue of the state of arts in education far outspans what we at [artsNK](#), based in Lincolnshire, can do on a national political scale. But we can, and do, make a difference to the lives of children and young people in our area, through our [InspireDance education programme](#). It is a bespoke service to all Lincolnshire schools (primary, secondary or special), designed to meet their needs and increase participation in dance.

In primary schools we mostly use the PE and Sport Premium funding, working with leadership teams and teaching staff to create a programme suitable for their school. This might include some staff training around being confident enough to teach dance as part of the PE national curriculum at primary level. Or it might include the delivery of schemes of work, topic-based units, specialist

workshops or creative residencies that work towards an event, such as a local dance festival, school celebration or an arts and culture week. Through our team of dance artists, schools can access high-quality teaching and know that their pupils, if only for a short period of time, get the chance to dance and learn something about themselves, their body and what it's like to move.

The programme when delivered in secondary education encounters all sorts of differences. While children in primary schools relish the opportunity to dance, enjoy taking part and then feel inspired, young people at secondary schools come with far more baggage. At Key Stage 3 (ages 11 to 14), we have often worked with young people who haven't had any experience of dance or the arts earlier in their life and don't want to participate because of their preconceived ideas about dance. Another notable difference is their negative attitude towards being physically active and we hear many excuses for not taking part. To combat this we use dance as 'health by stealth', a backdoor approach to PE. Young people view dance differently to other types of exercise and sport, and so it is a good way help to overcome the apathy towards getting active, as well as increase cultural awareness.

In our work in special schools, children and young people with profound and multiple learning difficulties have access to specialist dance artists who deliver something they have very limited access to. The dance sessions help them feel happy, build interaction and social skills and allow them to just move.

We see many positive changes in young people after taking part in our dance sessions. Some seek opportunities outside school in their community, some go on to study dance academically, while others will remember performing their dance on stage for the rest of their lives. Taking part in our sessions can also help children and young people understand their world better, tackle problems and learn through physical experience.

The future is uncertain. The continued success of dance in education, and the impact it can have on young people's lives and learning, lies in the choices that schools and headteachers make. If priorities are placed firmly on the teaching of STEM subjects or other such targets, the danger is that the next generation of young people will grow up without experiencing dance and other forms of cultural activity. It is important to offer a balanced and holistic learning experience for every child, so we will continue to work to convince schools, headteachers, leadership teams, local authorities and other providers about the benefits of dance by proving its worth and offering a wide, varied and high-quality programme that is easy to access. In this way we hope our work will continue to shape young lives and ensure that young people, in Lincolnshire anyway, will at some point experience dance in all its glory.

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